

EDUCATION, SCIENCE AND TRAINING

SENATE LEGISLATION COMMITTEE - QUESTIONS ON NOTICE 2007-2008 BUDGET ESTIMATES HEARING

Outcome

DEST Question No. E131_08

Senator Faulkner provided in writing.

Question:

1. To what extent is parliamentary education a priority under the PACER scheme? How were PACER priorities established?
2. What criteria are applied to determine how PACER payments are made?
3. How much funding has been made available for PACER and over what period?
4. Is the PEO program a mandatory requirement for a PACER payment? If not, why not?
5. On what evidence had DEST based its apparent concern about the capacity of the institutions involved to accommodate PACER numbers?
6. What procedures are in place to provide evidence to DEST that students have undertaken either a PEO program, or a tour of Parliament House, or both?
7. Please provide a breakdown of PACER funds paid in 2006-07 to students from each State and Territory:
 - a. in dollars; and
 - b. by year of schooling.
8. Which administrative unit in DEST is responsible for the day-to-day management of the PACER scheme? How many staff are involved, and what are the total annual costs of administering PACER?
9. Has DEST conducted any quality assessment or evaluation of the PACER, program? If so, what methods were used to conduct the assessment and what was the outcome? If not, are there any plans to conduct a quality assessment or evaluation of the program?
10. What written communication about PACER is provided by DEST to eligible schools and/or students? Could a copy of any such communication be made available?

Answer:

The Parliament and Civics Education Rebate

1. Parliamentary education is a priority under the PACER programme. Schools are required to visit Parliament House where they take a guided tour and participate in a Parliamentary Education Office programme where places are available for the school.

As the Department responsible for managing PACER, DEST determines priorities for the programme in consultation with an Advisory Committee which includes representation from the Serjeant-at-Arms Office, Old Parliament House and the Australian War Memorial.

2. The amount of rebate payable per student is able to be calculated using the website www.whereis.com based on the distance of the school from Canberra. After the excursion, the school verifies the number of students who travelled and who are eligible to receive the PACER payment.
3. \$16.3 million was allocated to the PACER programme over four years (2006-2010).
4. Schools are required 'wherever possible' to participate in an education programme at Parliament House. The phrase 'wherever possible' was used in relation to participating in a PEO programme so as not to disadvantage schools which are unable to obtain a booking.
5. DEST has been advised that many of the institutions providing educational programmes in Canberra are booked to capacity at particular periods of the year. This was reported at PACER Advisory Committee meetings.
6. Eligible schools receive a form – the Civic Visitation Form – which is stamped when the school visits the required institutions. The form also records what activities are undertaken at Parliament House, Old Parliament House and the Australian War Memorial. After their excursion, schools provide this form to make a claim for PACER.
7. A detailed breakdown on the 2006-07 rebates paid to students for each state and by year of schooling is not currently available. This information can be provided after 31 July 2007.
8. PACER is currently managed by the Australian History and Civics and Citizenship Education Section in the Curriculum Branch of the Department of Education, Science and Training. One Executive Level 1 position (costed at \$93,600 in 2006-2007) has direct responsibility for the programme. In addition, the Department makes the PACER payments directly to eligible schools.

The day to day administration and promotion of the programme is outsourced. In 2006-2007 administration costs totalled \$92,934.92.

9. The Department has closely monitored the PACER programme since it was implemented in July 2006 and shared this information with the PACER Advisory Committee. It is anticipated that there will be an evaluation of the programme towards the end of the funding cycle.
10. Schools have been sent the PACER Guidelines and a letter from the Minister about the programme to advise of the availability of this programme to schools. A range of promotional materials including the combined guidelines and application form were also sent to schools by the programme administrators. Promotion activities are ongoing.

Schools which apply for PACER are sent a letter confirming their eligibility along with the necessary forms for completion. After the excursion schools are sent a letter confirming the amount of payment they will receive. All information is provided to schools by the programme administrators.

The PACER guidelines and application form are available at www.ncetp.org.au.